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Security Council

Sixtieth year

Provisional

5230th meeting

Thursday, 21 July 2005, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Vassilakis	(Greece)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	Benin	Mr. Zinsou
	Brazil	Mr. Sardenberg
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Philippines	Mr. Mercado
	Romania	Mr. Motoc
	Russian Federation	Mr. Konuzin
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Brencick

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 19 July 2005 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2005/469)

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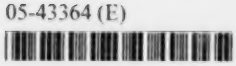

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 19 July 2005 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2005/469)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Norway, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table; the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. De Soto to take a seat at the Council table.

I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 July 2005 from the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2005/472 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held tomorrow, Thursday, 21 July 2005, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to participate in this meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mrs. Barghouti (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: I should also like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 July 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations, which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request you to allow, pursuant to rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure, His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani to participate in the public debate on the Palestinian question which is to be held in the Security Council on Thursday, 21 July 2005."

That letter will be published as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2005/471.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 to His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mahmassani took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 July 2005 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which reads as follows:

> "In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I have the honour to request that I be invited to participate in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council."

In accordance with past practice in this matter, I propose that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Paul Badji took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 20 July 2005 from the Permanent Representative of Yemen to the United Nations which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour, in my capacity as Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Group at the United Nations, to request that the Security Council extend an invitation to Mr. Ahmad Hajihosseini, Chargé d'affaires of the permanent observer mission of the OIC to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting of the Security Council on 21 July 2005 to consider the recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the Palestinian question, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council."

That letter will be published as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2005/473.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 to His Excellency Mr. Ahmad Hajihosseini.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Hajihosseini took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in response to the request contained in a letter dated 19 July 2005 from the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Kuwait to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, contained in document S/2005/469.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. I now give him the floor.

Mr. De Soto: The forthcoming Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank continues to overshadow all other issues. That is a statement of fact.

Disengagement is an important step forward and withdrawal from occupied territory, albeit partial and on terms largely set by the occupier, is a positive, precedent-setting step and one that the entire international community cannot but support. Moreover, as stated repeatedly by the Quartet, it offers an opportunity to re-energize the road map. It is a moment pregnant with hope, but also fraught with peril.

With respect to the Quartet's engagement and activities, the Quartet has met in recent weeks to review the situation at this critical time. In a statement released after its meeting in London on 24 June, the Quartet underscored its commitment to the broader implementation of the road map, which this Council endorsed in its resolution 1515 (2003), and to the vision of two States —Israel and a sovereign, viable, democratic and contiguous Palestine —living side by side in peace and security.

The Quartet continues to consider the road map and the two-State vision to be the best way to achieve a permanent peace and an end to the occupation that began in 1967. The Quartet condemned the upsurge in violence in Gaza and urged both parties to avoid and prevent any escalation in violence so that the Israeli withdrawal could proceed peacefully. It highlighted the importance of Israeli withdrawal and reiterated its full support for its Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, Mr. James Wolfensohn, and his efforts to assist with the non-security aspects of disengagement and the revival of the Palestinian economy. The Quartet is intensifying its monitoring of the situation. Envoys met in Jerusalem only last week and will meet again next

month and in September. Mr. Wolfensohn has spent much time on the ground devoting his energy and ingenuity to restoring a sense of hope and security among Palestinians and Israelis following the apparent paucity of results of the much-anticipated meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and Palestinian President Abbas on 21 June.

Specifically, Mr. Wolfensohn's efforts are focusing on a set of six key issues, which the parties are addressing jointly and urgently with his help and encouragement. They are, first, border crossings and trade corridors; secondly, connecting Gaza with the West Bank; thirdly, movement within the West Bank; fourthly, the Gaza airport and seaport; fifthly, the houses in Israeli settlements; and sixthly, the greenhouses and dairy industry in the settlements.

In addition, Mr. Wolfensohn has pointed out three essential areas the Palestinians should address, with the support of the international community. Those are, first, the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis and development of a fiscal stabilization plan for incorporation into the 2006 budget; secondly, the creation of a broad development plan linked to a fiscally sound financial plan for 2006 to 2008; and thirdly, the design of a package of quick-impact economic programmes that would provide an adequate response to pressures and demands for employment generation in the short term. United Nations agencies operating in the occupied Palestinian territory remain committed to supporting Mr. Wolfensohn's rapid action programme.

With respect to violence, the last few weeks have seen a gradual erosion of the informal quasi-ceasefire that had prevailed since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and President Abbas' Cairo agreement with Palestinian factions. Palestinian militants staged a number of attacks with mortar and Qassam rocket fire against Israeli settlements, as well as urban centres inside Israel. Shooting incidents in the West Bank, in particular, claimed the lives of several Israeli settlers, and the level of frequency of such incidents grew significantly. Partially in response to such incidents, Palestinian militants as well as unarmed Palestinians, among them teenagers, were killed by Israeli troops and security forces. On 20 June, a young woman from Gaza carrying 10 kilos of explosives — apparently a suicide bomber — was caught at the Erez crossing trying to enter Israel. Following the gradual increase in the violence of the last 10 days, Israel is taking more forceful action. The suicide bombing on 12 July in Netanya that killed five Israelis and wounded many others prompted Israeli forces to enter the West Bank city of Tulkarem, which, in turn, led to a firefight in which two Palestinians, one of them a member of the security forces, were killed.

Israeli forces have continued to operate in the West Bank city and have arrested large numbers of Palestinians. On 14 July, a Qassam rocket killed a young Israeli woman and wounded others, and Israel retaliated by firing missiles against targets in the Gaza Strip, after the Palestinian Authority's declaration of a state of emergency in the Strip and Palestinian security forces acting forcefully to prevent the launching of further rockets.

In the following days, the violence escalated further, with Israel, breaking the restraint observed in the past few months, resuming its earlier practices of targeted killings with the stated purpose of preventing terrorist operations. Seven Hamas militants were killed. Several escaped a missile attack on their vehicle. Israel began amassing military forces outside the Gaza Strip but vowed to give the Palestinian Authority a last chance to prevent mortar and Qassam rocket fire against Israeli targets inside and outside the Gaza Strip. Prior to those incidents, Israelis and Palestinians had continued their regular meetings in the realm of security with the help of United States Security Coordinator General William Ward.

The Palestinian Authority has been hard-pressed to establish law and order in both the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian Authority President Abbas reiterated his commitment to working towards "one authority, one gun" — a clear pledge to assert the Palestinian Authority's monopoly on the use of force.

I have referred to recent efforts following the increase of rocket firing from Gaza by militants against Israeli targets, which saw a number of casualties among Palestinian security forces, militants, and the civilian population in Gaza. Earlier, a number of worrying incidents had underscored the imperative need and urgency for the Palestinian Authority to assert its control and end violence and internal unrest.

On 23 June, a Palestinian policeman was killed as gunmen opened fire on a police station in Jenin. Later that evening, the house of a Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member in Jenin came under attack. Gun battles erupted on 24 June, as Palestinian

Authority security forces searched for and arrested 10 men suspected of being connected to the shooting incident.

Two international development workers were kidnapped on 13 July by armed Palestinians seeking the release of a family member from prison. United Nations intercession with the family helped to secure the release of the two later the same day.

More ominous were the statements and challenges to the Palestinian Authority emanating from Hamas prior to the confrontation between the militant group and the Palestinian Authority on 14 and 15 July. Rejecting an offer by President Abbas to join the Authority, a senior leader of the group threatened open confrontation with the Palestinian Authority and the continuation of attacks against Israel, "in order to liberate the West Bank and Jerusalem". But the Palestinian Authority has lately shown resolve to confront militants challenging its authority and to live up to its obligations under the road map to end the violence and begin dismantling terrorist capabilities.

On 23 June, a deal was reached involving the handover of weapons by more than 200 militants in Nablus, after earlier such deals had been reached and partially implemented in Tulkarem and Jericho. Upon Palestinian Authority President Abbas's arrival in Gaza last week, the barrage of rockets that was fired by militants against Israeli targets aggravated the problem further.

On 16 July, in a prime-time radio and television address, President Abbas made a ringing appeal to the Palestinians in which he strongly reiterated his commitment to assert his authority vis-à-vis militants threatening to upset the fragile calm that had prevailed in recent months. He stated:

> "No one is above the law, and we will chase those who participated in the attacks and punish them. There will be no more weapons on the street or in our cities and camps...We will use force against anyone who tries to trigger internal fighting ... Some have mistaken our keenness to preserve national unity as a sign of weakness. We will not allow anyone to obstruct the Israeli withdrawal."

Since then, with the help of Egyptian mediation, the clashes between Palestinian factions have given way to a renewed commitment to the relative calm that prevailed previously.

Turning to the Palestinian Authority elections, on 18 June, the Palestinian Legislative Council passed, with a significant majority, a new election law introducing the amendments proposed by President Abbas. The President additionally asked the PLC on 27 June to amend the Basic Law in order to create the position of Vice-President. No official decision has yet been announced concerning the date of the elections for the legislature, but the target appears to be January 2006.

Israeli domestic preparations for the withdrawal continue at a rapid pace. The Israeli authorities have had to deal with protests and demonstrations, efficaciously clearing a building in Gaza taken over by extremists opposed to disengagement. In addition to a number of arrests and minor injuries, a Palestinian teenager was attacked by Israeli extremists on 29 June but was rescued by an Israeli soldier. Following those incidents, the Gaza Strip was permanently closed off to Israelis not residing in the settlements there on 13 July. A similar order was issued with regard to the northern West Bank region, though its application has been left to the discretion of the local operational command.

On 3 July, the Cabinet had overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to postpone the withdrawal, thus underlining again the fact that the Government remains committed to the implementation of its plan, without delay. Following that vote, the Knesset, with an equally clear majority, rejected three bills calling for a delay of the withdrawal on 19 July, amid prolonged protest and demonstrations by those opposing disengagement and attempting to march on the Gaza settlement block of Gush Katif.

There is considerable evidence that settlement activity continues. Recent figures from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that construction in West Bank and Gaza settlements during the first quarter of 2005 significantly exceeded the overall rate of construction in Israel. New tenders have also been published, most recently on 6 July, when the construction of 18 housing units in Elkana was publicized.

At its meeting on 24 June, the Quartet once again expressed its concern over Israeli settlement activity and reaffirmed the need to avoid any action that would contravene the road map or prejudice final-status negotiations. On the other hand, on 10 July, buildings in the West Bank settlement outpost of Amuna were

evacuated voluntarily after a petition against the settlers living there.

Israel has also continued and accelerated construction of its barrier in the West Bank. On 10 July, the Israeli Cabinet discussed and approved remaining details of the route of the barrier around Jerusalem, which, it is projected, will cut off some 55,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem from the rest of the city. The Government also decided on 1 September as the new deadline for the completion of the barrier around Jerusalem.

I now turn briefly to Lebanon, where the situation remains a cause for concern. The Council has already been briefed on the assassination of George Hawi on 21 June, and I will not dwell on it. On 12 July, an explosion in a northern suburb of the capital caused the death of one person and injuries to 13 others, including the then Deputy Prime Minister and current Minister of Defence, Elias Murr. Both the Secretary-General and the Security Council have issued statements on those matters.

After the successful conclusion of the parliamentary elections carried out under the Government led by Prime Minister Nejib Mikati, Lebanon set about forming its new Government. On 28 June, Nabih Berri was re-elected as the Speaker of the National Assembly and Fuad Siniora, former Minister of Finance, was designated Prime Minister. Two days ago, Mr. Siniora announced agreement on the membership of the Cabinet, which will be subject to a vote of confidence in parliament early next week.

On 29 June the Security Council met to discuss the exchange of fire that had taken place that day between Hizbullah and the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), which began when a group of Hizbullah fighters breached the Blue Line in the Shaba'a farms area — one of several incidents along the Blue Line. The day after, Israeli helicopters violated Lebanese airspace and flew over the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Beirut dropping leaflets. Another incident occurred on 12 July, when, according to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), unidentified armed elements approached the Blue Line from the Lebanese side and fired four rounds from an AK-47 rifle towards an IDF position. Also over the past two weeks, there have been a substantial number of daily ground violations by Lebanese shepherds and civilians along the length of the Blue Line. The Secretary-General's report on UNIFIL (S/2005/460) refers to all of those matters.

The incidents along the Blue Line of 29 June and 12 July illustrate once again the need for the Government of Lebanon to make every effort to prevent attacks from its side of the Blue Line. Responding to the situation on the ground, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative for Southern Lebanon again urged the Lebanese authorities to exert their control over all of the country and to refrain from any violation of the Blue Line. He also called on Israel to cease its continuing violations of Lebanese airspace. Maximum restraint will be required in order to prevent the deterioration that all sides state they wish to avoid.

My erstwhile colleague Kieran Prendergast last briefed the Council in June and announced that I would come this month to give members my "first impressions". That is a tall order. The old vaudeville expression that someone is a hard act to follow applies doubly in this case: I walk in the footsteps not only of Kieran Prendergast, but also of Terje Roed-Larsen. Both brought to their work vast Middle East experience — decidedly not my case.

I ask members to bear in mind those mitigating circumstances as they consider the very personal closing comments I am about to offer, barely six weeks after taking on my current assignment. Without detriment to the United Nations commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive peace, I will concentrate on the Israeli-Palestinian portion of my mandate.

As I said at the outset, Israel's disengagement from Gaza dominates the agenda less than one month before the announced starting date. Some commentators draw an incongruous parallel between rocket and mortar attacks by Palestinian militants in Gaza against Israelis and the less lethal but very strident physical efforts of Israeli disengagement opponents to impede the implementation of that decision. They have in common only that they are rear-guard efforts to obstruct a move that is viewed positively by clear majorities on both sides.

The driving force behind the Israeli Government's decision to remove settlers from Gaza and to end the Israeli presence there is Israel's own interest. Prime Minister Sharon describes evacuation from Gaza as "vital" to Israel. In the classic calculus

that a win for one side is a loss for the other, satisfying an Israeli interest may strike some Palestinians as a loss, judging from their efforts to jeopardize it. Here, however, we are in the presence of an important step which defies that calculus: how could the dismantling — the first ever — of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory be anything but a gain for the Palestinian side, offering as it does — through the efforts of James Wolfensohn, with the strong support of the international community — the prospect of an early and tangible improvement in the daily lives of Palestinians and a return, via the road map, to substantive peace efforts?

Although the deterioration of the informal ceasefire is profoundly disquieting, there have been encouraging developments since late last week, consisting of the vigorous actions of the Palestinian Authority security forces, pursuant to President Abbas's efforts, to restore law and order and particularly to intercept militants preparing to attack Israelis. The President's forceful address to his people at the end of last week was a most welcome display of leadership. Hope was also provided by the report only two days ago that the ceasefire has been renewed and that the Palestinian factions are committed to end internal fighting.

I have no doubt regarding the determination of the Government of Israel to proceed unswervingly with disengagement. Israeli authorities have provided clear evidence that they will not allow Israeli extremists to prevent the plan from being carried out. It is to be hoped that the combination of measures by the Palestinian Authority and the return of relative calm will make it unnecessary for the Israeli Defence Forces to use the unlimited discretion that they have reportedly been given to take intrusive military action to quash attacks against Israelis from Gaza. At this time, it is essential not to lose sight of the overall goal.

The unease, suspicion and even cynicism that bedevil Israeli-Palestinian relations can be attributed in large part to the fact that the disengagement is not taking place within an unequivocally agreed framework for the next steps towards the overall solution to which both sides claim adherence, that is, two States living alongside one another in peace. Israelis need to be assured of their security, and Palestinians need to be provided with hope. Beyond the tangible improvements in their daily lives, the intangible element of a perspective for the future would be critical to instilling that hope.

It is of paramount importance that stability be preserved and that the Palestinian Authority be empowered to successfully counter militancy and extremism. Such empowerment will also be an element of central significance in the preparations to take control of the areas that Israel is withdrawing from. As we have stated repeatedly in the Council in recent months, and as United States Security Coordinator Lieutenant General Ward has pointed out, Israel could and should do more to support the Palestinian Authority in its efforts to reign in the militants. Consequently, both the Palestinian Authority and Israel have homework to do: the Palestinian Authority has to continue to exert control and authority, while Israel has to strengthen the hand of moderate forces and enable the Authority to impose itself successfully.

One area in which Israel can and should take the initiative is meeting its parallel obligations under the road map, in accordance with which Israel should freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, and immediately dismantle all settlement outposts erected since March 2001. The recent voluntary evacuation of the West Bank outpost of Amuna — after a petition had been filed against the settlers living there following the Government's official adoption of the Sasson report's recommendations — illustrates that it is possible to meet those obligations.

It is equally important that Israel take steps to meet its legal obligations related to the barrier. One senior Israeli cabinet minister recently stated that, among other things, the route of the barrier "also makes Jerusalem more Jewish". While it would not be entirely fair to hold the Government to a perhaps inadvertent choice of words of an official in the heat of a radio interview, that and the revelation that some 55,000 Palestinian residents of Jerusalem will be shut out of the city as a result of the routing can only fuel the fear that the barrier is designed to prejudge the outcome of eventual permanent status negotiations. Those issues should be as much a part of the short-term action agenda as energetic Palestinian action against militants targeting Israelis.

The broader implementation of the road map and the eventual realization of the two-State solution, as outlined in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), must remain the goal. We aspire to the end of the

occupation that began in 1967, the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State and its coexistence in peace and security alongside Israel. We also continue to work towards the broader realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the road map and the 2002 Beirut Arab summit declaration and based on resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), and 1515 (2003).

In sum, while there was a perilous turn back to the abyss in the past month or so, there have been some glimmers, particularly in the last week, that may point to a new beginning.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mrs. Barghouti (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, I should like to express our deepest regret in connection with the painful events that took place a short time ago, and again today, in London. Let me reaffirm our condemnation of such terrorist acts targeting innocent civilians. Intensified international efforts are required to combat such crimes, irrespective of who their perpetrators are.

At the outset of my statement, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the current month. We are confident that your experience and wisdom will lead to the success of the Council's deliberations. And allow me to thank the Permanent Representative of France for his presidency of the Council last month.

I should also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Alvaro de Soto on his appointment as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The delegation of Palestine always stands ready to cooperate with him to ensure the success of his difficult mission. We thank him for his comprehensive and detailed briefing to the Council this morning, which we shall not discuss in our statement because we wish to focus on the latest and the gravest events.

The Security Council is meeting this morning to discuss the difficult and deteriorating conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. While the international community is directing its efforts towards the success of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and some areas in the northern West Bank, Israel, the occupying Power, is accelerating its steps to carry out its expansionist, colonialist plan, expanding colonial settlements, speeding the building of the wall and isolating the occupied section of Jerusalem from the West Bank. The Israeli Government is exploiting the fact that the international community is focused on, and desires to see, the success of the withdrawal from Gaza by accelerating the creation of facts on the ground, thus imposing an illegitimate fait accompli in the attempt to undermine all possibilities of creating an independent, sovereign Palestinian State within the borders of June 1967.

The Israeli Government's approval on Sunday, 10 July of the route inside East Jerusalem of the separation wall, which segment is expected to be completed in the next few months, is a grave development. It is a direct challenge to the international community, all the more so because it coincides with the one-year anniversary of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on the wall, which ruled that the wall was illegal, that Israel had the obligation to immediately cease construction and demolish the parts that had been built and that Israel must repeal all laws pertaining to the wall. The Court further emphasized that the United Nations — in particular the General Assembly and the Security Council — must consider the additional measures necessary to put an end to the situation of illegality resulting from the construction of the separation wall and from the related regime.

Because of its desire to see the success of Israeli disengagement from Gaza, the international community has been reluctant to exert pressure on the Israeli Government and has been condoning Israel's current settlement activities, its land confiscations, its isolation of Jerusalem and its work to complete the wall; that will not necessarily succeed in reviving the peace process or the implementation of the road map. To the contrary, we believe that this situation portends a veritable catastrophe with dire consequences for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, for the region and for the world, and that it could undermine a final two-State solution.

Today, the Palestinian people is being subjected to siege, oppression and killing. The suffering it undergoes daily is escalating. Economic and social conditions are deteriorating because Israel, the occupying Power, continues to violate international law

and international humanitarian law. It flouts United Nations resolutions and, indeed, international unanimity. In that way, it poses the greatest of challenges to the international community and to the sanctity of international law. It is as if that State were above the law.

Since September 2000, the occupying forces have killed more than 3,670 Palestinians. They have wounded more than 45,000 others. They have wreaked widespread destruction, including the demolition of homes and the destruction of industrial and agricultural areas and infrastructure. In numerous letters, we have informed the Security Council, the Secretary-General and the General Assembly of the terrifying developments on the ground and of Israel's violations of international law and international humanitarian law. Those violations include the continuing extrajudicial killings, the killing or wounding of civilians, the random and excessive use of force, the continuing closures, the prevention of the movement of individuals and goods and, more serious still, the continuing colonization of our lands, the continuing expansion of illegal settlements and the construction of the wall. These destroy our present, our future and the possibility of peace between the two sides and of the implementation of a two-State solution.

The understandings previously reached at Sharm el-Sheikh were an encouraging beginning for a return to the negotiating table and for calming conditions on the ground. The Palestinian National Authority has taken a number of steps to meet its Sharm el-Sheikh commitments. But the Israeli Government has met none of its commitments, least of all with regard to withdrawal to the lines of September 2000, the freeing of prisoners and ending illegal extrajudicial assassinations, the closures and the siege imposed on our people.

The Palestinian leadership is committed to negotiation as a means to reach a peaceful settlement based on respect for international law and international legitimacy. In that regard, the Palestinian National Authority is eager to see Israel's disengagement from Gaza be successfully carried out in a calm manner, so that we can move directly to the implementation of the road map leading to final negotiations. We stress the importance of the completion of Israel's disengagement from Gaza and from parts of the northern West Bank before the end of 2005. It is important that the international community not permit Israel to use prevarication and procrastination to distract it while completing its colonial settlement plan for the West Bank.

We are very grateful, Mr. President, for the speed with which you responded to the request for the convening of this meeting. We hope that the Security Council will be able to take immediate measures to address this expansionist policy, which is a flagrant violation of international law and which violates the terms of the road map and Israel's commitments set out in it.

Once again, we reiterate our call to the international community to abide by the legal opinion of the International Court of Justice. Here, United Nations bodies, including the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the Security Council, should accelerate the implementation of their obligations set out in the opinion and in General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 with regard to establishing a register of damage and to following up on the report to the Assembly requested from Switzerland, in its capacity as repositary of the Geneva Conventions.

In that regard, we will be calling for a resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. That, however, does not set aside the responsibilities and duties of the Security Council as set out in the International Court of Justice opinion.

We look forward to the day when the international community, and in particular the Security Council, will ensure that Israel respects international law and international humanitarian law, in accordance with the Court's opinion of approximately one year ago, and will ensure that Israel respects the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, particularly its right of self-determination and its right to the cessation of Israeli occupation of its land.

The President: I thank the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine for the kind words she addressed to me.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you again on your leadership of the Security Council. I should also like to congratulate Mr. Alvaro de Soto on the assumption of his important and daunting tasks and to commend him for his clear, comprehensive and professional report.

As we sit here today at the behest of the Palestinians, we should all ask ourselves, why indeed are we here? Are we here to deal once again in acrimony and spend precious time on diatribes and distorted facts, as we have just witnessed and heard? Or should we, at this watershed moment in the history of our war-torn region, seize the moment to see the larger picture and paint the wide canvas our people deserve and that the Council should, and I believe truly wants to, paint.

However, I feel a certain degree of gratitude for the opportunity given to us today by this Palestinian initiative to discuss the situation in the Middle East, or as the initiators of this meeting have chosen to call it, "the dire situation on the ground". Let me share with the Council the situation on the ground, which is truly dire. The situation that has seen more than 25,400 terrorist attacks against Israelis in less than five years is indeed dire.

To put things in perspective in this world we live in — which, as we have witnessed again today, is a very cruel and cynical one — that is an average of more than a terrorist attack every two hours, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for five consecutive years.

On the ground, in Netanya, on 12 July, a young Palestinian strapped with explosives detonated himself at the entrance of a shopping mall. Five people, including two teenaged girls, died in that suicide attack: Julia Voloshin, Anya Lifshitz, Moshe Maor Jan, Rachel Ben Abu and Nofar Horowitz — fathers, mothers and children. These halls must never forget their names. Ninety more people were wounded in that horrendous attack alone.

The situation on the ground in the Israeli community of Beit Hagai is also dire. On 24 June, Palestinian terrorists driving a vehicle opened fire on several Israeli civilians, all of them just teenagers, killing one of them.

The situation on the ground is dire in the Israeli village of Nativ Ha'asara. On 14 July, a 22-year-old woman was killed while sitting on the porch of her home, as a result of a Qassam rocket. Hamas and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade have showered the skies this month with Qassam rockets. That tiny community has suffered nearly 1,000 such rockets in recent years. Several other communities were also shelled on 14 July, with rockets landing near a nursery school, near a playground, and directly hitting people's homes.

The situation on the ground in Shlomi is also dire. On Israel's Independence Day, only a few weeks ago, in the midst of celebrations, members of a terrorist militia in southern Lebanon fired a 107-millimetre mortar shell specifically at civilian targets.

Those are only a few examples of the incessant terrorist activities resulting in the murder of innocent civilians. The situation on the ground for those who died, their families, neighbours and friends is gruesome, cruel and, indeed, dire.

The situation in the Middle East is also dire, given that on the other side of our northern border the only force that is in control of the territory is a terrorist organization helped, sponsored and guided by two States Members of the Organization.

As we speak, the Government of Israel is preparing to implement a fateful and unprecedented initiative: the disengagement of all Israeli civilians and forces from the Gaza Strip and the dismantling of four settlements in the northern West Bank. Israel is taking bold, courageous actions to reinvigorate the peace process on behalf of all those involved in this drawn-out conflict.

As I have said, that initiative is unprecedented in its scope, in the challenges it raises and in the hope it has the potential to give to the Palestinian and Israeli peoples alike. As anyone following developments in our region is aware, this is a painful and heart-wrenching moment for the Israeli people. The implementation of this plan, in the absence of any corresponding acts of good faith from our Palestinian neighbours, has created troubled divisions within our society. But the Israeli Government and its leaders, at no small political and, sadly, personal risk, are determined to follow through on their commitment to implement that important and bold initiative.

The disengagement initiative is not Israel's first plan of choice. We would have preferred a fully negotiated agreement with our Palestinian neighbours. Indeed, Israel's Prime Minister made that clear in December 2003, when outlining the disengagement initiative for the first time. Addressing the Palestinians, he said:

> "We would like you to govern yourselves in your own country: a democratic Palestinian State with territorial integrity and economic viability, which could conduct normal relations of tranquillity,

> security and peace with Israel ....We hope that the Palestinian Authority will carry out its part. However, if in a few months the Palestinians still continue to disregard their part in implementing the road map, then Israel will initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians".

Since then Israel has waited not months, but years; and the Palestinian Authority still shows no sign of implementing even the first commitment in the road map, which calls for

> "an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism and ... visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere".

The terrorist attack in the shopping mall in Netanya just 10 days ago gives voice to the sad truth behind the plethora of terrorist attacks: they endanger not just the lives of Israeli citizens but also innocent Palestinians, the new Palestinian leadership, the disengagement plan and the peace process as a whole. It should be very clear, however, that Israel will not waver in its intention to complete the disengagement and pursue peace. We should hope that the leaders of the Palestinian Authority will confront the threat of terrorism accordingly. If the Palestinian leadership does not eradicate terrorism, terrorism will ultimately eradicate it.

The prevention of terror emanating from Palestinian areas is entirely the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority and its leadership, a responsibility that it has thus far has failed to fulfil. Moreover, even the previous period of quiet was only superficial. In that time, dozens of terrorist acts were carried out every month, and a far greater number prevented. In fact, the campaign of terror has continued unabated, at varying levels of intensity, since September 2000. As I stated before — and this number must resonate in the Chamber yet again — nearly 25,400 terror attacks were committed since then, of which 142 were homicide bomb attacks.

The Palestinian delegation requested the convening of this meeting of the Security Council in order to discuss the conditions on the ground. Let there be no confusion about the situation in Israel: we are in the midst of a historic, courageous political decision in order to improve the lives of Israelis and Palestinians. It is almost cynical that the Palestinian Authority is raising these issues with the Security Council at a time when the deteriorating security situation is the result of Palestinian terrorists and the Palestinian Authority's unwillingness to fulfil its obligations. The impression one gets is that this debate is somehow a smokescreen for more broken Palestinian promises. And, in their wake, Israel must do everything within its ability to combat terrorism. That is the foremost responsibility and right of any nation: to protect the lives of its citizens.

The onus of preventing Palestinian terrorism in all its forms lies clearly with the Palestinian Authority. Israel has transferred control over cities to the Palestinian Authority and armed Palestinian security forces in exchange for promises that the Palestinians would combat terror, which is a commitment reiterated in the road map. As a result of the Palestinian leadership's failure to confront terrorism, Israel was left with no choice but to find defensive measures to protect itself, such as the security fence.

The reality is that the security fence works. It saves hundreds of lives. There has been a reduction of over 90 per cent in the number of successful terrorist attacks, a 70 per cent reduction in the number of citizens killed and an 85 per cent reduction in the number of wounded. All of that can be attributed directly to the effectiveness of the security fence. In Samaria, for instance, 448 individuals died as a result of terrorist attacks prior to the completion of the security fence in August 2003.

Israel remains sensitive, however, to the impact of the necessary defensive measures it has been forced to take. Israel is coordinating with Palestinian Authority officials in order to facilitate humanitarian passage in all areas. As we speak, teams of Israeli and United Nations experts are examining the consequences of those measures on the freedom of movement of Palestinian civilians. Israel and the Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, James Wolfensohn, are working together to enhance contiguous movement between Palestinian areas.

Indeed, the fence's routing has been altered a number of times, either as a result of the continuous judicial review to which it is subjected or as a result of humanitarian concerns that have come to light only upon the completion of a certain section. Each section of the fence is scrupulously examined in light of strict

humanitarian criteria as determined by the Israeli High Court of Justice, the only justice system in the region where an Arab or Palestinian can go to court against his own Government, seek justice and get it, rather than be thrown in prison or get beheaded. It should also be noted that the construction of the fence has enabled Israel to remove checkpoints, thus relaxing day-to-day freedom of movement in northern Samaria.

Israel has further established methods to address difficulties that might arise as a result of the fence's construction, both on the practical level — such as the more than 70 agricultural gates in the fence — and on the legal level by providing affected landowners the possibility of lodging objections to the proposed route and of claiming compensation from a special standing fund established precisely for that purpose. That mechanism guarantees appropriate compensation for those affected and obviates the need for any alternative measure, such as the ill-proposed register.

In the absence of any demonstrable leadership on the Palestinian side, it has fallen to Israel to implement its disengagement initiative. Even as a reluctant fallback plan, however, the disengagement initiative — let it be clear — is not a replacement for negotiations. Indeed, as Israel has repeatedly stated, the initiative can pave the way to the implementation of the road map and lead the parties back to the road to a negotiated resolution of the conflict.

However, for the disengagement initiative to play the role as a bridge to increased cooperation and a return to the road map process requires recognition — both from the Palestinian side and from the international community — that there are rights on both sides of that equation, including the Israeli side, and responsibilities on both sides, including the Palestinian side. The road map sponsored by the Quartet, of which the United Nations is a member, is predicated on the assumption that both sides have commitments and responsibilities for which they must be held accountable.

Initiatives that seek to focus exclusively on and exaggerate Palestinian victimization, while avoiding Palestinian responsibility, not only ignore genuine Israeli concerns, but do a grave disservice to all those Palestinians seeking reform, transparency and accountability. For there to be any genuine possibility of a lasting resolution to the conflict, all parties, including the international community, have to abandon the simplistic and one-sided representations that have distorted the true reality, and recognize that no side has a monopoly on suffering and that the dreams of neither side can be fulfilled in full.

The Security Council convenes today to address grievances that do little to improve peace efforts in the region. Critics of Israel were historically obsessed with ending the occupation of disputed lands, yet once Israel engaged a plan to hand over land in an act of good will, as it is doing today, its critics obfuscate the issue by diverting the attention of the Council to this untimely and unnecessary discussion. Let this Council see through that diversion and the very absurdity it represents.

Let there be no mistake — Israel has great respect for the Council and the revered principles upon which it was built. It is precisely because of our deep respect for those principles that we find dismay in the pernicious attempt to hijack its mandate and actions. Today's discussion signifies yet another blemish in this Council's agenda. It is such diversions that influence the need for United Nations reform. We call upon this Council to look beyond the diversion and witness the larger picture: a tiny country, marred by terrorism, mobilizing its citizenry and political will to take a bold step for peace in the region.

Let us not be diverted by false rhetoric. Let us not be blinded by distorted images. Let us not be derailed by old tactics. Let us rise to the occasion, observe the large and hopeful picture, and seize this moment to allow this historic process to be successfully completed. Let us march forward rather than backwards, in hope rather than despair, towards a better future for our children — Israeli and Palestinian alike.

The President: I thank the representative of Israel for his kind words addressed to me.

We have a long list of speakers. I am fully aware of the importance of the discussion that we are having today and fully aware of past practices. Nevertheless, I wish to kindly request all speakers to limit their statements, to the extent possible, to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I wish to begin by thanking Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his briefing on the most recent events in the Middle East. I wish him every success in his complex tasks.

It is with great concern that we have recently witnessed a further deterioration of the situation and a renewed rise of tension in the Middle East. Indeed, following a calm of several months, extrajudicial killings, repression and acts of violence have resumed with fervour. We sadly note that, yet again, the victims have been civilians and that the vast majority have been Palestinian.

At a time when we were full of hope at seeing the long-dormant peace process show some signs of life and the resumption of the implementation of the road map following the national Palestinian consensus on the declaration of a ceasefire that allowed political activities to resume and Israel's commitment to withdraw from Gaza — and it must be recalled that the withdrawal needs to be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and lead to a complete departure from all territories occupied since 1967 — Israel has once again cast doubt on the revived impetus of the peace process. In point of fact, the Israeli Government recently decided to extend settlements in the West Bank, primarily around Al-Quds, and to step up construction of the wall around that city. The consequence and aim of that measure are quite clearly to break the last remaining geographic link between the Holy City and the rest of the Palestinian territories.

In that regard, I wish to recall that Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory are unlawful and illegal under international law and that the Israeli decision to expand them is but a fresh attempt to impose another fait accompli in order to obstruct efforts aimed at a just and lasting settlement and thereby impede the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State.

Taking advantage of the impunity which it has always enjoyed even within the Council, Israel has consistently adopted a policy of fait accompli and of the use of force, disregarding the principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The latest provocation was the fact that the decision taken by Israel on 9 July regarding the line of the wall around Jerusalem coincides with the first anniversary of the publication of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion, in which it stated unequivocally that the construction of the separation wall in Palestinian territory was illegal. That same decision was taken by the General Assembly in resolution ES-10/15 on 20 July 2004. In its opinion, the Court touched on the very source of the conflict in the Middle East — the illegal occupation by Israel of Palestinian territories.

The fact that Israel took that decision at that precise time is proof — as if proof were needed — of the disregard that Israel has always had for international law. It is a harsh blow for the international efforts under way, and it can lead only to a deterioration of the recent positive climate that was beginning to prevail recently in the region and unleash further violence.

As recommended by the Court, the Security Council should consider what actions should be taken in order to put an end to the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall. It should consider also measures to induce Israel to end extrajudicial executions and the demolition of houses, dismantle the settlements and tear down the illegal separation wall.

Moreover, it is urgent for the Quartet to intervene to dissuade Israel from implementing its decision to expand its settlements and to induce it to honour its commitments under the road map. That would allow for the resumption of a serious and lasting peace process, with a view to putting an end to Israeli occupation and to guaranteeing the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Finally, the economic situation in the occupied territories, as described, is of the greatest concern to us. This situation is worsened by the financial difficulties faced by Palestinian Authority, which has already been weakened by Israel's incessant attacks on its infrastructure, combined with blockades in the territories and repeated Israeli incursions, particularly those involving the demolition of houses.

Further, I would express the concern of my delegation at the situation in the Syrian Golan, where Israel's ongoing settlement policy continues to undermine regional and international efforts aimed at arriving at a just and comprehensive peace in the region, as well as the situation in Lebanon, where, despite Security Council resolutions, incidents have been occurring once again and where violations and

acts of aggression against the sovereignty of that country, as well as provocations, have taken place in recent weeks.

The international community, represented by the Quartet, must take action to arrive at a just and lasting settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, based on respect for resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), as well as on the principle of land for peace.

Mr. Konuzin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. De Soto, for the briefing he has given us on the current state of the peace process.

We were very alarmed to hear of the acute flare-up of tensions in the Gaza area. This happened as a result of attempts by extremist forces in that area to stir up the military and political situation and to cause the situation to deteriorate in the run-up to Israel's planned withdrawal, in mid-August, from Gaza and a portion of the West Bank of the Jordan River. The radicals also obviously are attempting to undermine the policy of peace agreements with Israel, which have been implemented by the head of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas.

We believe that the best response to those forces that oppose progress in the Palestinian-Israeli settlement process is a responsible and restrained position by the parties and coordinated steps in the area of security that are designed to prevent anarchy and uncontrolled violence.

It is important now for the Israelis and the Palestinians strictly to abide by the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements and to move forward, in a coordinated manner, with efforts to resolve those issues, in order to ensure Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, which must be an organic part of the process set out in the road map.

Russia, together with other members of the Quartet and other interested parties, remains fully prepared to provide all necessary assistance to advance the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process and actively to facilitate practical efforts to establish a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

In that regard, we call on the parties to refrain from any steps that could predetermine the results of final status talks, first and foremost as regards Israel's continuing construction of the separation wall, whose path, particularly in the area of Jerusalem, affects the interests of the Palestinians. We would also fully affirm the legitimate right of Israel to self-defence against terrorist attacks.

We are concerned about the settlement issue. We have already said that we expected the Government of Israel to keep its promise to deal with the settlements upon completion of the relocation process. We continue to expect this.

At present, all efforts of the international community are focussed on promoting Palestinian-Israeli cooperation in the run-up to implementation of the relocation plan. However, the Russian side has called for, and will continue to call for, the achievement of a comprehensive Middle East settlement — meaning the achievement of peace also on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. Failing that, there can be no stability in the Middle East.

We view the relocation plan as only the start of renewed movement, in the context of the road map, towards implementation by both the Israeli and Palestinian parties of their obligations under that document which, we are firmly convinced, is the only alternative and whose implementation is the most certain way to achieve a settlement for the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Given the complexity of the problems which face the participants in the settlement process, we would like to remind the Council once again of our proposal to hold, in the fall of this year, a high-level expert meeting to discuss the results of the relocation and to determine longer-term strategies for the international community in the context of the peace process.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to thank Alvaro de Soto for his briefing and for his comments. We wish him every success in carrying out his mission, which is both difficult and important.

Permit me to begin by indicating that my delegation subscribes fully to the statement to be made shortly by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union.

Several weeks before the Israeli disengagement from Gaza is to begin, the situation in the Middle East unfortunately remains a subject of great concern. As that important stage approaches, every effort must be

made to ensure that there is not a new spiral of violence. The ceasefire is one of the most valuable and most fragile achievements of recent months. Its preservation requires that the parties show the greatest restraint and that they resume their dialogue and cooperation, including in the area of security, to put an end to the violence.

France therefore most strongly condemns the suicide attack committed in Netanya exactly a week ago and the rocket and mortar fire that claimed the lives of Israeli civilians. We call upon the Palestinian Authority to intensify its efforts to restore public order in the Palestinian territories. That is an absolute imperative a few weeks before the withdrawal from Gaza begins. For its part, Israel must show restraint and, in particular, must put an end to its policy of targeted killings, which can only exacerbate the spiral of violence.

As Alvaro de Soto rightly said, a successful Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is in everyone's interests. But the Palestinians' political future must not be limited to the withdrawal; that must be an initial step within the framework of the road map. In that connection, the Quartet must fully play its role of engaging and assisting the parties in carrying out their obligations under the road map. We therefore favour the holding of an international conference at the appropriate time.

With regard to the security barrier, we fully recognize Israel's right to take forceful measures to protect its citizens against terrorism. But the route decided upon for the security barrier is now giving rise to many concerns. In fact, the barrier extends into Palestinian territories several kilometres to the east of the Green Line, contradicting the relevant provisions of international law, as the International Court of Justice stated last year in its advisory opinion. The construction, if it were to be irreversible, would constitute a de facto annexation of a substantial part of the West Bank. It would seriously compromise the prospects for a negotiated solution to the conflict by prejudging the border of a future Palestinian State and indeed by making the building of such a State physically impossible.

The construction of the wall is giving rise to large-scale dispossession. It puts thousands of Palestinians in a very precarious situation. The wall socially and economically destabilizes entire regions and threatens the economic and geographic viability of a future Palestinian State.

We therefore call upon the Israeli Government to halt the construction of the barrier within Palestinian territories, including around East Jerusalem, and to dismantle the existing sections there, in accordance with the relevant provisions of international law. The European Union will not agree to any non-negotiated modification of the borders established before 1967.

Mr. Manongi (United Republic of Tanzania): We join previous speakers in thanking Ambassador Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his update on the situation in the Middle East, which reminded us of the many obstacles that continue to confront the peace process.

During the last briefing to the Council on this subject, hopes of reaching a Palestinian-Israeli understanding were expressed after an improved political climate had developed in the region. The successful completion of the presidential elections in January, followed by the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings in February and the London meeting in March, provided an opportunity for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to commit themselves to end violence, to build trust and to work together towards an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank in August. Given that positive momentum, the international community committed itself to support the parties in moving the peace process forward. Emphasis was placed on a full and complete withdrawal consistent with the road map, marking an important step towards realizing the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security.

Recent events on the ground have suddenly overshadowed those positive gains through unrelenting violence and counter-violence, resulting in the injuries or deaths of several innocent people and in the loss of property. The renewed state of violence is, in our view, quite alarming. We continue to condemn the suicide bombing in Netanya and the firing of rockets that killed several innocent Israeli civilians. We urge that those events, coming less than one month before Israel's scheduled pullout, should not be allowed to undermine the withdrawal, which is an important element of the peace process.

It is therefore our hope that the withdrawal will be sustained, coordinated and peaceful. In that regard, we commend the Palestinian Authority for its prompt

action in preventing the continuation of the attacks directed against Israel and in insisting on a smooth Israeli withdrawal. For its part, the Israeli Government has acted well by rejecting requests for delay in the withdrawal and by standing firm against opposition to the disengagement process.

However, we regret the decision to proceed with the construction of the separation wall in and around East Jerusalem. That step, together with the accelerated settlement activity, does not bode well for the peace process. The continued construction of the wall and the settlement activity go against earlier understandings and stand to undermine the true spirit of mutual confidence that is critical if any substantial progress towards peace is to be made.

We urge both the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to remain steadfast in their search for peace and security for their peoples and for the region. In the past, they have shown that they can overcome the many challenges that they face. We have an obligation to encourage and support them. The setbacks that they encounter must not be allowed to derail the peace process.

I now turn to the matter of the Blue Line separating Israel and Lebanon. We are concerned at reported violations by both sides that have led to injury and loss of life. We urge the new Lebanese authorities to strive to exercise greater control over all their territory and to bring to an end the attacks emanating from its side. Israel, for its part, should refrain from air violations of the Blue Line. Neither the two parties nor any of us must move backward; we must preserve the gains made so far.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil): I wish to thank Alvaro de Soto for his comprehensive briefing and insightful comments. My delegation — myself in particular, because of my longstanding friendship with Mr. De Soto — was very pleased at his appointment as Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, which was a clear recognition of his diplomatic skill and capacity.

I also express our appreciation for the holding of this public meeting in response to the request made by the Arab Group.

The peoples of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories now face a critical moment that has the true potential to overcome the deadlock and the paralysis that have characterized the peace process in recent years. As our delegation sees it, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank is a first, yet are important, step towards the end of the occupation and the embodiment of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, by means of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the conflict. It is therefore essential that it be successful.

In that context, the Israeli Government should be encouraged to persevere in its efforts towards disengagement in accordance with the proposed timetable. Coordination with the Palestinian Authority, so that the operation can be undertaken in a smooth and orderly manner, is of crucial importance. Actions taken in that regard in recent weeks should be commended, and my delegation believes that they must be intensified in the days to come. At the same time, facilitation efforts undertaken by international partners and neighbouring States are to be praised.

Our Government noted with satisfaction the most recent statement by the Quartet principals in London, in which they emphasized the urgent need for Israel and the Palestinians to work directly and cooperatively with each other, with the assistance of James Wolfensohn, the Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement. The Quartet also stressed that the coordinated support of the international donor community is crucial for the success of Mr. Wolfensohn's mission, and it urged Arab States to engage fully in that regard.

The complex, sensitive character of the Israeli withdrawal requires that calm and stability prevail on the ground to the greatest extent possible. My delegation believes that the recent escalation of violence in the area runs counter to the interests of both sides and that the parties must do their utmost to ensure restraint and must abide by the understandings achieved at Sharm el-Sheikh, with a view to maintaining the ceasefire.

The practice of extrajudicial killings by Israeli forces, resumed in recent days, must be halted. My delegation also followed with deep concern the intensification of rocket and mortar attacks by Palestinian armed groups against Israeli targets, including civilians. One of those attacks resulted in the death of an Israeli girl of Brazilian origin, a sad fact that our people received with profound regret. My

delegation also condemns the terrorist attack that took place in Netanya some days ago. In that context, my Government viewed positively the news that the commitment to the ceasefire made by Palestinian factions will be honoured. Brazil believes that, at this stage, all Palestinians should be focused on supporting and providing leverage to the Palestinian Authority in its undertakings.

Confidence-building is a core element at the present juncture. My delegation is therefore alarmed at news of increasing settlement activities in the West Bank and, even worse, Israel's revision of the route of the wall and the acceleration of its construction around Jerusalem. Those measures deeply affect efforts to promote trust between the two Governments and between their peoples. They also have a very negative impact on the prospects for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict, as they affect core final status issues.

The construction of the wall around Jerusalem is likely to affect the daily lives of 55,000 people, as the Special Coordinator mentioned this morning. Moreover, it also prejudges the resolution of a dispute over an issue that has been central since the creation of the partition plan and which has been subject to many resolutions of the United Nations, by both the Security Council and the General Assembly. I recall that any solution on the status of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both sides and include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure freedom of religion and of conscience for all its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to all Jerusalem's holy sites by people of all religions and nationalities. Israel should be encouraged to reverse its decision on that matter, as well as to comply with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice in all activities related to the wall.

Brazil is deeply alarmed at the dire humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied territories. In that context, my delegation commends the endeavours undertaken by Special Envoy Wolfensohn to address that situation and alleviate the plight of the Palestinian people. My Government is willing to contribute to those efforts, in particular by providing assistance and expertise for the establishment of social programmes on the ground. The Brazilian authorities are deeply interested in exploring modalities of cooperation in that regard.

Most of all, however, my delegation stresses the importance of Israel facing up to its responsibilities in that field by easing constraints on the flow of goods and people in and out of Gaza and the West Bank and between them.

With respect to the situation in Lebanon, my delegation is pleased at the designation of the new Government. Brazil is certain that the new authorities will work in the interest, and for the benefit, of all Lebanese people. For its part, the international community should be supportive of the Government's efforts. Actions that could have a negative impact on Lebanese unity and stability must be avoided.

With respect to the situation along the Blue Line, my delegation reiterates its call on both sides for restraint and full compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. In the coming days, the Council will consider the Secretary-General's report on the activities of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (S/2005/460). Brazil favours the renewal of the Force's mandate for a further six-month period, taking into account the prevailing tensions in the area and the request made by the Lebanese Government in that regard.

Finally, I wish to reaffirm our commitment to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East that takes into account the need to address all aspects of the conflict.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation thanks Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his detailed briefing. We know Mr. De Soto very well; he is an old friend. He has many years of experience in the service of the United Nations, and we have high hopes for him. We hope that, with his outstanding abilities and diplomatic wisdom, he will continue to move the Middle East peace process forward to further progress.

Compared to the situation of four months ago, recent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian situation are cause for concern. One year after the International Court of Justice issued its opinion on the question of the separation wall, the Israeli Government has announced that it will accelerate its construction of that wall in East Jerusalem. That contravenes the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, and it is bound to exacerbate Israeli-Palestinian discord. The matter of Jerusalem's final status should be resolved through peace talks by the parties

concerned on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

China hopes that the Israeli and Palestinian sides will jointly maintain the good atmosphere that has emerged this year in the situation in the Middle East, and continue their efforts towards reconciliation.

China expresses its concern about the recent escalation of violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. That situation underscores the importance and urgency of ensuring security and ending violence. We have noted that Mr. Abbas, the Palestinian leader, has gone to the Gaza Strip to bring the situation under control and that the Israeli side has postponed military action against Gaza. We hope that both sides will maintain the greatest restraint and restore the tranquillity that has prevailed in recent months at an early date.

Through Palestinian and Israeli efforts and the mediation of the international community, there has been an easing of tensions this year, which has been rare in the past four years. It is generally felt that 2005 is a year of opportunity. But the onset of opportunities and the fulfilment of hopes must be based on mutual trust. Any slight slackening of caution on either side will not only disrupt the good atmosphere, it will also seriously impede the peace process.

I once again appeal to both sides to display political courage and wisdom, to remain on the path of peace talks, carry out their obligations under the road map for peace in the Middle East and, eventually, achieve the peaceful co-existence of two independent States.

The attainment of Israeli-Palestinian peace is inextricably linked to effective support from the international community. Along with the international community, China will follow the situation closely and make tireless efforts to move the Middle East towards the earliest possible establishment of peace and stability. As an important body in the area of the maintenance of international peace and stability, the Security Council should also play an effective role in that regard.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): Let me first thank Ambassador De Soto for his first briefing since his appointment as Special Coordinator. We have high expectations for his work as we approach the start of Israel's disengagement from Gaza and part of the West Bank. We look forward to Mr. De Soto's prudent handling of that process.

While we welcome the start of the disengagement from Gaza and appreciate the Israeli Government's firm determination to implement the withdrawal despite some domestic opposition, we must express our concerns over the recent resumption of violence by militant Palestinian groups and the Israeli army. Such violence threatens the continuation of the *tahadiya*. In those circumstances, it is important that President Abbas exercise strong leadership to ensure self-restraint on the part of the Palestinian groups concerned. We appreciate that Palestinian groups, including Hamas, have confirmed their continued observation of the *tahadiya*. Israel and the international community should provide effective support for President Abbas.

The essential point in this connection is that the withdrawal should be conducted undisturbed and should make it possible to open the way for the resumption of the road map's implementation. For that to happen, it is critically important that the two parties make the utmost effort and that, at the same time, the international donor community provide financial and other support for that effort, including financial support from Arab countries.

Vigorous efforts are needed on the Palestinian side to bring about drastic improvement in security measures. For the Palestinian Authority, the challenge is to reduce and stop violence. That is important not merely for a successful disengagement from Gaza or for the promotion of peace with Israel, but also, in a more fundamental sense, as proof that the Authority has the basic capability necessary to function as a State. We therefore support the reform policy pursued by President Abbas, just as we also support the efforts made by General Ward in that area.

Japan supports the coordination efforts made by Mr. Wolfensohn to secure trade and communications routes, including easing restrictions on movement and the construction of a safe passageway. We expect that Israel will adopt a more flexible attitude that will ensure the safety of movement of the Palestinian people and of goods with greater efficiency.

Japan has sought to play an active and constructive role to promote peace in the Middle. As part of those efforts, my Government invited Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas to Japan.

President Abbas made his visit last May. On that occasion, a new assistance programme for Palestinians amounting to $100 million was announced to facilitate disengagement and rehabilitation in Gaza and the West Bank. That programme will be implemented as soon as possible. That was followed by the visit to Israel and Palestine of our special envoy for the Middle East, Ambassador Arima, to underscore that the success of the disengagement from Gaza was a prerequisite for the revitalization of the road map. Japan will continue its active engagement in the area of economic assistance, and for the advancement of the peace process, including through further emergency relief for the Palestinian people in Gaza and the northern West Bank and through mid-term and long-term assistance for the sustainability of the Palestinian economy.

Concerning the issue of the wall, we saw a positive development in February of this year, when a considerable part of the wall's path in the southern area was rerouted from a course running inside the Green Line to one coinciding with the Green Line. However, construction of the wall inside the Green Line continues at other locations. With regard to this issue, we have maintained the view that, first, the lives of a large number of innocent Israelis have been lost through Palestinian terrorist acts, and that the Palestinian Authority must make the utmost effort to suppress terrorism.

Secondly, the construction of the wall inside the Green Line — which the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice determined to be contrary to international law — is adversely affecting the livelihood of Palestinians and is prejudicial to the outcome of the final status negotiations. It must therefore be stopped. It is to be deplored that the construction of the wall inside the Green Line is continuing. We are especially concerned about the construction of the wall in the area of East Jerusalem, which is taking place at the very moment when heightened caution is required for the success of the withdrawal from Gaza. That construction is also taking place in an area that is considered one of the most sensitive in the final status negotiations and that has a large number of people who will be adversely affected.

We believe that the resolution of the issue of the wall and that of settlements is possible only through the process of the steady implementation of the road map. That is yet another reason why it is so important for the two parties to make disengagement from Gaza a success and to allow that success to flow on to re-energizing the process of implementing the road map. Japan stands ready to offer its support to the two parties to implement the road map and realize the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace.

Japan welcomes the formation of the Siniora Government in Lebanon on 19 July. As Lebanon faces many difficult challenges that will require delicate handling, we hope that Prime Minister Siniora and his Government will be able to exert leadership and set about addressing the many problems at hand as soon as possible.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I would like to fully associate Denmark with the statement of the European Union to be made shortly by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom.

First of all, let me thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, for his thorough briefing and insightful observations.

Denmark has continuously been of the view that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank, if successfully implemented, can be an initial stage towards achieving a fair, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In order for it to be a success, it must be consistent with the road map, it must be complete, and it must be coordinated with the Palestinians as well as with the international community. Therefore, Denmark strongly urges that all efforts be focused on making the disengagement successful.

In that regard, we are encouraged by the political courage shown by the leaders of the two sides. We hope that, with only one month to go, coordination between Israel and the Palestinians will be intensified, especially with regard to such key issues as access to and from Gaza. Moreover, Denmark encourages the Palestinian Authority to accelerate reforms and Israel to put in place the conditions essential to a viable Palestinian economy. Denmark is of the view that the Quartet and its Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, James Wolfensohn, deserve all possible support from the international community.

Denmark has noted the ongoing contacts, including at a high level, between Israel and the

Palestinian Authority. It is essential to progress that such contacts improve both in substance and frequency and take place at all levels. Moreover, it is of great importance that both parties renew their efforts to implement the commitments made in Sharm el-Sheikh and that they refrain from taking unilateral measures that might prejudice the outcome of negotiations on the final settlement. In that context, Denmark remains concerned about the continued construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land, which is contrary to the relevant provisions of international law.

In that light, I would like to reiterate that Denmark will not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties. Denmark is of the view that the way to achieve a permanent peace is a viable two-State solution achieved through the full implementation by both parties of their commitments under the road map.

Denmark is very concerned about the recent escalation of violence in Israel and the occupied territories. We have condemned in no uncertain terms the recent terrorist attacks on Israel, as well as the violence by Palestinian militants against Palestinian security personnel. While we recognize Israel's right to protect its citizens, we are against extrajudicial killings, which are contrary to international law.

In order to avoid a return to the cycle of violence that has characterized recent years, Denmark urges Israel to exercise maximum self-restraint and the Palestinian Authority to take immediate and effective action against those involved in the attacks.

Mr. Motoc (Romania): Allow me to say first that, as an acceding country to the European Union, Romania aligns itself with the statement to be made shortly on behalf of the Union by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom. My remarks will therefore be brief.

Before anything else, I wish to join other speakers in welcoming the presence of Ambassador Alvaro de Soto in the Council for the first time since his assumption of his new assignment as United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. Being well aware of his vast experience, my delegation is fully confident in Ambassador De Soto's ability to successfully discharge the new important and challenging mandate entrusted to him. We extend our gratitude for the comprehensive and in-depth presentation he has just offered to the Council.

Sadly, over the past weeks, acts of violence between Israelis and Palestinians have once again multiplied and escalated. People have died and suffered on both sides. Terror has struck again and claimed innocent lives. Israelis and Palestinians should spare no effort in advancing together towards the realization of the two-State vision. That can be achieved only if the parties proceed without delay to the full implementation of their obligations under the road map. Taking effective action against terrorism and dismantling the associated infrastructure should be top priorities for the Palestinians. To that end, they must pursue and accelerate the reform of their security services, taking full advantage of assistance provided by the international community.

Correspondingly, Israel must cease its settlement activities, which are contrary to its obligations under the road map, and avoid taking measures that could prejudge the final result of negotiations, especially with regard to territorial issues, including those in connection with Jerusalem. From that point of view, the construction of the barrier remains of great concern. While undoubtedly playing an effective role in protecting Israeli land and nationals, the erection of the barrier inside the Palestinian territories cannot be regarded as being in compliance with the relevant provisions of international law.

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, which will start soon, is a courageous move and we once again commend the Israeli leadership for its resolve in overcoming all obstacles to that plan. Its successful implementation will provide a good opportunity to ease the burden of unsettled issues in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and therefore serve the general purpose of advancing towards peace. For that to happen, the parties concerned must cooperate and coordinate closely before, during and after the disengagement, especially with the aim of creating the conditions necessary for post-withdrawal economic recovery in Gaza.

Dialogue is the essential ingredient in reaching any political objective. We encourage leaders on both sides to continue to pursue their contacts and broaden the agenda of the meetings taking place at various levels. The final goal should be the resumption of peace talks in order to reach, through negotiations and in accordance with the provisions of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict in

the Middle East. Romania is actively involved in the pursuit of that agenda for peace, as shown by the outcomes of the recent visit Foreign Minister Ungureanu made to Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Concerning other developments in the region, namely in Lebanon, the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) is a prerequisite for enabling Lebanon to fulfil its longstanding aspiration to full political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call upon all parties concerned to cooperate fully in that process and, inter alia, to support the activity of the independent international investigation commission looking into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Mr. President, I should like to thank you for convening today's open debate to discuss this important item at the request of the countries members of the League of Arab States. At the same time, I should like to thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, for his excellent presentation today and to congratulate him on the work he has done so far in carrying out his difficult mission.

In our view, recent developments are a further indication of the extreme fragility of the situation in the Middle East, in particular in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian track. Unfortunately, after some months of relative calm, the level of violence has increased significantly, mainly affecting the civilian population on both sides. The new wave of violence jeopardizes the achievements of recent months and could greatly erode trust between the parties. For that reason, we believe that the seriousness of the situation must not be underestimated either by the international community at large or by the Security Council.

Argentina strongly condemns all recent terrorist acts that resulted in the death of innocent civilians. In particular, I should like to state our unequivocal condemnation of the suicide bombing that took place on 12 July in the city of Netanya and of the Qassem rocket attacks fired from the Gaza Strip. All of those acts are unjustifiable. We would recall that the Palestinian Authority has the obligation to take decisive measures against terrorist groups and to prevent the territory under its control from being used as a base for attacks against the population of Israel. We are aware of the challenges faced by the Palestinian Authority in this field, and we welcome the recent efforts made by President Mahmoud Abbas. However, we believe that those efforts should be strengthened to send a clear message to Palestinian extremist groups that violence cannot be accepted or tolerated.

Israel has the legitimate right to defend itself against such attacks, but it must be exercised in conformity with the principle of proportionality and must, despite all the difficulties in this regard, be in accordance with international law. Accordingly, we request that the practice of targeted killings not be resumed and that the human rights of the Palestinian population and humanitarian law be respected at all times.

As we have said, we believe that Israel should act in conformity with international law in respect of the construction of the separation barrier and settlement activities. My country has previously expressed its opposition to the construction of the separation barrier in the occupied Palestinian territories. Today, we reiterate that position and call on the Israeli Government to comply with the July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and with General Assembly resolution ES-10/15.

The 9 July decision of the Israeli Cabinet to accelerate the construction of the barrier in East Jerusalem is manifestly contrary to the reiterated calls of the international community; we believe it should be revised, and we call on the Government of Israel to do so. Likewise, we believe that all settlement activities should cease and that settlement outposts should be dismantled in accordance with the road map.

In spite of the negative developments we have described, we believe that the sole option for Israel and for Palestine is a future of peaceful coexistence, with both of them living side by side in peace and security. In that regard, we consider that plans to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank should go forward as a first step towards putting an end to the occupation that began in 1967. The commitment of both sides to cooperate in the implementation of that initiative is essential, as is the active participation and assistance of the international community. Less than a month before the withdrawal begins, all efforts should be concentrated on its successful completion. The parties should therefore refrain from taking measures that could undermine the initiative. Here, we

congratulate Prime Minister Sharon and the Israeli Knesset on their continued firm position in that regard.

With regard to the situation in the region in general, we welcome the recent formation of a new Government in Lebanon as a consequence of the elections that concluded a month ago. We congratulate Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and the members of his Cabinet on their appointment. We hope that the formation of the new Government will help to stabilize the situation in that country, thus allowing the people of Lebanon to live free of violence and intimidation. Likewise, we hope that such progress in the political process will contribute to the implementation of the outstanding provisions of Security Council resolutions related to the situation in Lebanon. In addition, I wish to reiterate our condemnation of the repeated violations of the Blue Line and our call upon the parties to cease such violations and respect the Line in its entirety.

I wish in conclusion to reaffirm my country's commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on resolutions adopted by the Security Council.

Mr. Brencick (United States of America): My delegation thanks Special Coordinator Alvaro de Soto for his informative briefing and wishes him every success in his challenging new mission.

The United States reiterates its serious concerns regarding the challenges faced by the international community and by the parties in bringing about a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic Middle East.

With respect to the Israeli-Palestinian situation, it has been three years since President Bush put forward his vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Since then, a strong international consensus has developed behind that vision and behind the road map for peace designed to achieve that vision. Both parties have clear obligations under that roadmap. Progress on the road map and moving towards that vision of two States living in peace and security cannot be achieved by rhetoric and blame. Right now, the focus of our efforts, as well as those of the international community, should be on working towards the successful implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan.

United States Security Coordinator William Ward has been on the ground since 9 March to assist in reforming the security services and to coordinate international assistance in the area. The Quartet's Special Envoy, James Wolfensohn, has identified six short-term and three longer-term challenges to economic recovery and is working closely with the parties on those issues. Overall, progress has been made, but much work needs to be done to ensure that this complex operation is a success.

Disengagement holds the potential to reinvigorate the road map and to realize genuine progress towards peace. We believe that the road map and existing mechanisms, including the Quartet, are the best avenues for moving the parties forward. Everyone here supports the road map, and the Council has specifically endorsed it.

A central challenge to be addressed between now and mid-August remains improving the security situation and creating conditions that will be conducive to the success of the disengagement plan. President Abbas has taken some concrete steps towards security reform, which we encourage. He has made clear that he will hold his security chiefs accountable for their performance in halting attacks on Israelis. However, overall Palestinian performance in confronting terrorism has been far from satisfactory, and this must remain an area of concern for us.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, we urge the new Lebanese Government to move towards full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004), including militia disarmament. Our position on Hizbullah has not changed. It is a designated foreign terrorist organization and cannot play a role as a legitimate political actor until it renounces violence and disarms. The recent violent events initiated by Hizbullah along the Blue Line on 29 June and 12 July underscore the danger that this militia poses to international peace and security.

We are also deeply concerned about Syria's closure of its border with Lebanon. Although we welcome legitimate efforts to interdict illicit trade and the movement of terrorists and their assets, the severity of that effort clearly illustrates an ulterior motive on the part of the Syrians. This is clearly an attempt by the Syrian Government to strangle the economy of Lebanon by impeding trade across their border, which is Lebanon's gateway to the rest of the Arab world and a means of continuing to interfere in Lebanese affairs.

The situation underscores the need for the two Governments to establish normal and sovereign

relations between themselves in order to resolve problems such as this. At the same time, this is an issue that is affecting Lebanon's trade with other Arab nations, and we would expect that they would also make their views known to the Lebanese and Syrian Governments.

This is yet another example of Syria interfering in Lebanon. The Syrian Government is signalling, not only to the Lebanese but to the rest of the world, that it is still trying to call the shots there.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): I have the honour also to speak on behalf of the European Union. In addition, the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey and Croatia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries Iceland and Liechtenstein members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

I, too, am grateful to Mr. Alvaro de Soto for his briefing. I wish him every success in his new role.

European Union (EU) ministers, on 18 July, recalled and stressed the global strategic importance of peace, stability and prosperity in the Mediterranean and the European commitment to the resolution of the Middle East conflict. The European Union supports the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank as an initial stage towards achieving a fair, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

On behalf of the Union, High Representative Javier Solana visited the region from 10 to 14 July. There he re-emphasized the European Union's commitment to keeping both parties engaged in the peace process and in the implementation of the road map, and, furthermore, to ensure that EU action should be coherent, focussed and coordinated with the Quartet and the international community.

On security, the European Union is gravely concerned at the recent escalation in violence in Israel and the occupied territories and has condemned unreservedly the recent terrorist attacks on Israel that have resulted in a number of Israeli fatalities and injuries. We have also condemned violence by Palestinian militants against Palestinian security personnel.

While having repeatedly condemned terrorist atrocities against Israelis, and recognizing Israel's right to protect its citizens against terrorist attacks, the European Union has consistently opposed extrajudicial killings, which are contrary to international law. The European Union emphasizes that Palestinians and Israelis must not return to the cycle of violence that has been characteristic of recent years. We urge Israel to exercise maximum self-restraint and the Palestinian Authority to take immediate and effective action against those involved in attacks.

We commend the political courage shown by the leaders of the two sides with regard to the withdrawal from Gaza and certain parts of the northern West Bank. A successful disengagement is vital, and only one month remains before it is scheduled to start. EU ministers have therefore reaffirmed the need for both parties to the conflict to make every effort to take advantage of the opportunity presented by disengagement and, furthermore, urge Israel to ensure that withdrawal is complete and coordinated with the Palestinians and the international community. We call for intensified coordination between Israel and the Palestinians, which is central to achieving tangible results, especially with regard to the crucial issues of access to and from the Gaza Strip.

The European Union fully supports the Quartet and its Special Envoy for Disengagement, James Wolfensohn, and his mission. The Union is determined to work in close cooperation with him to ensure the success of disengagement, and we urge the international community, including Arab States, to do likewise. The EU has emphasized the urgent need for Israel and the Palestinian Authority to cooperate effectively with one another and with Mr. Wolfensohn in order to support Palestinian institutional and economic development. It wants the Palestinian Authority to accelerate reforms and Israel to put in place the conditions essential to viable Palestinian economic growth.

While noting the ongoing contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, including the meeting between the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian President on 21 June in Jerusalem, we want such contacts to improve in both substance and frequency and to take place at all levels. Both sides should renew

their efforts to implement the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh and avoid any action likely to undermine mutual confidence. Crucially, no party should take unilateral measures which might prejudice the outcome of negotiations on the final settlement. In that context, the European Union is concerned about the recent Israeli Cabinet decision to complete immediately the separation barrier in and around East Jerusalem.

On law and order, the European Union has urged the Palestinian Authority to step up its efforts to ensure a secure environment in which its citizens' own needs for law and order are met. We are committed to contributing to the development of Palestinian security capacity through the Palestinian civil police, in coordination with United States Security Coordinator General Ward.

On final status issues, EU ministers on 18 July recalled that the Union will not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties. We continue to believe that the way to achieve a permanent peace is a viable two-State solution, achieved through the full implementation by both parties of their commitments under the road map.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the European Union's position regarding the Israeli separation barrier. While the European Union recognizes the right of Israel to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks, it has demanded that Israel stop and reverse the construction of the barrier inside the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, which is in contradiction to the relevant provisions of international law.

Mr. Zinsou (Benin) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks you, Mr. President, for having convened this open meeting of the Security Council to allow us to consider developments in the situation in the Middle East, including Palestine.

We thank Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his excellent briefing to the Council. We commend the efforts of the international community, particularly the Quartet, to ensure that the disengagement proceeds in a coordinated manner. We welcome the Knesset's decision to oppose any postponement of that disengagement.

In that context, we express our support for the mission entrusted to two special envoys for the disengagement: General Ward, responsible for helping the Palestinian Authority set up appropriate structures for reforming the security apparatus, and Mr. James Wolfensohn, responsible for issues that do not concern security. We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to ensure that Mr. Wolfensohn has all the assistance he needs to establish an office in Jerusalem so that he can carry out his mandate.

Those efforts by the Quartet clearly demonstrate the will of the international community to assist in the implementation of the disengagement, which is considered to be a stage of the implementation of the road map approved in resolution 1515 (2003) as a framework for the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the end of the occupation.

It is regrettable that those efforts are now being thwarted by the renewed outbreak of violence in Gaza with the approach of the occupying Power's disengagement, which is to take place in August. My delegation is following this new crisis with great concern; it has already forced the Palestinian Authority to declare a state of emergency in the occupied territories.

However, the agreements reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit allowed us to hope that the weapons would fall silent, which would permit the resumption of a frank dialogue between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority with a view to the implementation of the disengagement plan. It is essential to reverse this negative trend, which can only compromise the outcome of the operation, given the real risk of worsening tensions in view of the actions of the forces of the occupying Power and of the Palestinian resistance.

In that regard, we do not understand the obstacles that continue to hinder freedom of movement and circulation in the occupied territories. We also deplore the continued destruction of Palestinian property in the occupied territories and the resumption of the practice of the extrajudicial killing of Palestinian militants, in flagrant violation of the commitments undertaken at Sharm el-Sheikh. We call upon the occupying Power to put an end to that practice. For its part, the Palestinian Authority must take all appropriate measures to prevent attacks targeting Israeli civilian populations.

The continued construction of the wall of separation despite the decision of the International Court of Justice constitutes a real challenge for the international community. We urge the Government of Israel to substantially implement the Court's decision, particularly with regard to halting the construction, dismantling the wall and returning property confiscated in that connection.

We are also concerned by the continued construction of settlements in the occupied territories. Ending the construction and dismantling those settlements are obligations under the road map, which is and remains the indisputable point of reference for carrying out the peace process. Here, we express our attachment to the main objective of the peace process: the creation of a Palestinian State existing side by side with Israel within fixed and internationally recognized borders.

Disengagement from Gaza would be a decisive step in that direction. We urge all the parties involved to do their utmost to ensure the success of the process now under way in order to open up new prospects for the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given the central nature of this conflict, all progress on the ground will have positive repercussions on the whole range of situations that affect the region's stability.

Mr. Mercado (Philippines): We welcome Mr. Alvaro de Soto, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and thank him for his first briefing to the Council on the latest developments in the region, particularly the recent outbreak of violence that not only claimed the lives of several people and wounded several dozens more, but also left a tenuous ceasefire in tatters.

It has been nine days since a Palestinian militant slipped into the city of Netanya, blew himself up, together with five Israelis, and scarred 30 others for the rest of their lives. That tragedy, which we all wish had not happened, plunged the region into another bloody episode in a war that seems to have no end. The Philippines condemns the suicide bombing in Netanya and the resulting cycle of violence and counter-violence, from the assassination by Israel of suspected militants to the torrent of death and destruction unleashed by Palestinian extremists, which shattered the fragile truce that the international community has been trying to keep in place since February.

The Philippines recognizes Israel's right to legitimate self-defence as a result of the latest suicide bomb set off inside its territory, but we strongly feel that that should not be seen as a licence for Israel to take extrajudicial actions. We join others in deploring this Israeli reaction. In the same way, we abhor the retaliatory action of militants who were responsible not only for launching rockets and mortars against Israeli targets, but also for setting off what has been described as the worst factional fighting in northern Gaza in years.

The ceasefire needs to be put back in place, and it must hold if we want the peace process to move forward. We call on both parties to abide by the agreements reached at Sharm el-Sheikh. The Philippines also calls on Israel and Palestinian militants to salvage the truce by exercising restraint and by refraining from taking further action that could jeopardize the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to enforce the rule of law and maintain peace and stability in the area.

We commend President Mahmoud Abbas for asserting his authority by ordering Palestinian security forces to prevent militants from launching further rocket and mortar attacks against Israel. Having been in office for a little more than six months, President Abbas should be encouraged and given the time and the support he needs to consolidate his authority and to pursue reforms in his Government. We continue to place our trust and confidence in President Abbas as a key partner in the international community's efforts to find a meaningful and comprehensive solution to the conflict.

We also join others in welcoming the efforts of the Quartet's special envoy, James Wolfensohn, to address the dire economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. In addition, we commend Egypt for facilitating the agreement between Fatah and Hamas that ended several days of street fighting between Palestinian security forces and rival factions. Such fighting has complicated the efforts to bring peace to the region.

While we welcome Israel's planned disengagement from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, that disengagement must be full and complete if it is to contribute positively to our search for a permanent solution to the Palestinian question. At the same time, we call on Israel to help bring the peace process

forward by halting its settlement expansion activities, particularly in Maaleh Adumim, in compliance with its commitments under the road map.

We also join others in urging Israel to stop the construction of its separation wall, as called for by the international community in General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004 and the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity as the representative of Greece.

We give many thanks to Mr. Alvaro de Soto, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive and useful briefing on the latest developments in the Middle East.

Greece fully associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union.

Today's open debate comes at a most critical juncture on the long and difficult road towards achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

Over the past few months, we have witnessed a strong and solid commitment by both sides. Their respective leaderships have taken bold decisions, often at great political cost, to move the process forward. They have resisted sizeable internal pressures. On numerous occasions they have publicly declared that they will honour and proceed with the commitments they have undertaken. That is to be commended.

The upcoming Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank, when completed, will indeed constitute an important milestone. It should be seized upon as a momentous opportunity to revitalize the road map and to move the process a step closer towards achieving a fair, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The success of Israeli disengagement is of paramount importance. All parties have an important stake in it. We are well aware that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed immediately and that need to be resolved in a manner that ensures a positive and successful outcome.

Both sides should make every effort to work directly with each other and to cooperate in finding the optimum solutions to the various issues involved in a coordinated, peaceful and smooth handover. Contacts between the two sides at all levels should be intensified and should be operational and forward-looking. Greece fully supports the mission of the Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, Mr. James Wolfensohn, and his efforts to assist in the non-security-related aspects of the disengagement and in the revival of the Palestinian economy.

The Israeli disengagement will be judged over the long term. Thus, provisions for the day after disengagement should be put in place. The viability of a successful disengagement should be consolidated by developing the necessary conditions — political, economic and security — to ensure, to the extent possible, that there will not be a reversal of the progress that will have been achieved.

The economic revival of the Palestinian territories will be crucial to ensuring long-term benefits arising from the opportunity presented by the Israeli disengagement. All efforts in that direction should be supported and enhanced. Initiatives such as the 1 March London meeting on supporting the Palestinian Authority must include the appropriate follow-up.

Notwithstanding Israel's legitimate security concerns, immediate steps must be taken to relieve the economic hardships faced by the Palestinian people and to facilitate rehabilitation and reconstruction by easing the flow of people and goods in and out of Gaza and the West Bank and between them.

Although our attention is focused on the upcoming Israeli withdrawal, we must not lose sight of the wider context. Our shared goal is the realization of a two-State solution: Israel and a democratic, viable and territorially contiguous State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

We are concerned at the recent upsurge of violence, which has threatened to upset the delicate truce of the past few months. As tensions are running high, it is necessary that both parties do their utmost to curb attacks and counterattacks, including extrajudicial killings, in order to prevent a return to the vicious circle of violence that has beset the region for so long.

Therefore, confidence-building between the parties is a key aspect. Greece would like to recall the understandings reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit on 8 February and encourages both sides to proceed

without delay with the implementation of those understandings.

We are also concerned at continued Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and at the continued construction of the separation barrier, as well as the Israeli cabinet's decision to immediately complete its construction in and around East Jerusalem, with apparent dire humanitarian consequences for a large number of the city's Arab inhabitants.

It is important to reiterate that the road map remains the framework for the achievement of just and lasting peace. Both parties should concentrate on fulfilling their respective obligations and commitments under the road map. They should also refrain from any and all unilateral actions that threaten to prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations and that undermine efforts to build confidence on the ground.

The role of the international community, the Quartet in particular, remains extremely important in that it has to be actively involved and engaged in supporting the parties in their efforts to realize and implement their respective commitments.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are a number of speakers remaining on my list. In view of the lateness of the hour, and with the concurrence of the members of the Council, I intend to suspend the meeting until 2.50 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 1 p.m.